



July 29, 2021

RE: Planning Our Communities (POC) 2021-22 Budget Recommendations

Dear Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem, and Council Members,

Throughout our community, Austinites continue to face the impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the resulting economic downturn, and Winter Storm Uri. These impacts are being felt most severely by communities of color and working-class communities. As the Austin City Council considers adopting the 2021-22 Proposed Budget, Planning Our Communities (POC) asks for increased funding for anti-displacement, homelessness, and emergency assistance efforts. We thank Council for its allocation of the American Rescue Plan Act funding towards addressing homelessness and rental assistance. However, additional funding is required to ensure that we can keep owners and tenants in their homes during this critical time.

Our city has made significant strides in reimagining public safety over the past year, and we ask Council to build on these efforts and fund community priorities. Due to the State mandate laid out in HB 1900, we ask Council to decline increasing the Austin Police Department budget beyond the 2019-20 allocation, including one time or one-year expenses. Instead, we are joining the Austin Justice Coalition and other community organizations in asking that any new funding for the department be reviewed in light of competing community needs. Funding anti-displacement, homelessness, and emergency assistance initiatives and increasing city capacity to implement these programs, should be a top priority during the ongoing crisis.

### **Anti-displacement**

- Create a sliding-scale estate and probate planning program for low and moderate-income homeowners and an educational and assistance program to help eligible homeowners apply for a homestead exemption.
- Expand the Tenant Stabilization Program within the Housing and Planning Department, which includes legal representation, education, and outreach. The stabilization program should also include more robust tenant representation and enforcement of healthy housing, for example to address the need that was demonstrated in the aftermath of Winter Storm Uri.



- Add one (1) full-time equivalent position (FTE) within the Housing and Planning Department (HPD) Displacement Prevention Division for a Displacement Prevention Navigator. This position should conduct community outreach and connect community members to resources, creating a two-way feedback channel. In addition, this position should support ongoing community organizations in their anti-displacement work.
- Reallocate two (2) FTEs from the Project Connect Office to the HPD Displacement Prevention Division for work in relation to Project Connect. These positions should focus on planning for the \$300m in anti-displacement funding, socializing and applying the Equity Tool, guiding community engagement on anti-displacement, and working to create key performance indicators related to equity.

### **Homelessness and Emergency Assistance**

- Expand the Relief of Emergency Needs for Tenants (RENT) rental assistance program to ensure that tenants are protected as we phase out of federal and local eviction protections. Provide renters with robust assistance in applying to the RENT program and other available rental assistance programs through contracting with community organizations.
- Add one (1) FTE within the Homeless Strategy Office for a Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Program Manager. This position should help in coordinating community-wide efforts, leveraging existing assets and programs, and identifying opportunities to expand permanent supportive housing opportunities.

It is critical during this time to fund community needs and support the most vulnerable Austinites. We thank you for your leadership and look forward to continuing discussions on an equitable 2021-22 budget with you.

Sincerely,

Planning Our Communities Leadership Team